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II. WASHO SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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A number of changes have taken place in Washo social organization since the end of the aboriginal period: the form of marriage has changed from non-sororal polygyny to monogamy; the system of kinship terminology is apparently changing, as indicated by the existence of a set of alternate kinship terms; the sororate and levirate have been abandoned; and a weak system of agamous moieties has been lost. Other elements of social organization appear to have been fairly stable, e.g., rule of residence, patterns of descent and inheritance, and form of the family.

The analysis of Washo social organization given in this chapter is based on the investigations of Barrett (1917), Curtis (1926), Kroeber (1907; 1917), Lowie (1939), and Siskin (MS), and upon the following kinds of data which I gathered in the field. First, the most reliable elderly informants were intensively interviewed about all aspects of social organization both past and present. Second, kinship schedules were obtained from seventy informants ranging in age from ten to over eighty. In addition, brief life histories and census data were collected in the course of the genealogical interviews. The life histories provided information on forms of marriage. Residence rules were determined both from the census material and from the life histories, since both kinds of data are necessary to establish residence rules adequately (Fortes, 1949; Goodenough, 1956; Murdock, 1955). Finally, sociometric data using family visiting patterns as the criterion were collected with the thought that, if any incipient unilineal kinship groups were present, they might be discoverable from the pattern of interfamily visiting.

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The methods used to determine change in social organization were the same as those used by Bruner (1955), Eggan (1937), Gough (1952), Nett (1952), Schmitt and Schmitt (n.d.), and Spoehr (1947). The writings of earlier investigators and interviews with older informants supplied information on changes in residence rules, kinds of kinship groups, and forms of marriage. Changes in the system of kinship terminology were determined by comparing the variant usages contained in the large sample of modern kinship schedules with what was thought to be the aboriginal Washo kinship terminology. For the Washo, the aboriginal terminology may be established with relative confidence because the early kinship schedules collected by Kroeber (1907; 1917) and Lowie (1939) agree closely with each other and with the terminological system used by the majority of modern Washo.

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Terminological change has a restricted meaning here. It refers only to changes which result in a new type of terminological system. Since the widely used classifications of kinship systems are based on the consanguine relatives of ego's generation and the first ascending and first descending generations (Spier, 1925; Lowie, 1928; Murdock, 1949), a change in the nomenclature of cousins or aunts and uncles is significant whereas change in terms for grandparents' siblings or affinal relatives is not significant. The genealogical interviews conducted in this research dealt primarily with relatives critical in defining the type of kinship terminology.

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